

Frequency and Grammaticalization of Adverbial expressions in Moroccan Arabic: A Corpus-Based Investigation

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Grammaticalization is a diachronic linguistic process that elucidates the dynamic interplay between language use, cognitive reanalysis, and the emergence of grammatical systems (Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Bybee, 2010). While existing research on grammaticalization has predominantly focused on verbs and conjunctions, e.g., Heine & Kuteva, 2002; Traugott & Dasher, 2002; Hopper & Traugott, 200, adverbial expressions, in particular those frequently used in spoken discourse as dynamic sites of morphosyntactic change, still have not received much scientific attention. Relatively, the present study investigates the role of frequency and discourse context in the grammaticalization of adverbial expressions in Moroccan Arabic (MA). In detail, it seeks to explore how adverbials such as /daba/ ‘now’ and / mən bəʕd/ ‘afterward’, while retaining their adverbial functions, exhibit pragmatic enrichment and functional divergence in frequent uses, such as discourse markers, clause-linkers, or auxiliary-like elements.

This study is based on data drawn from a naturalistic contemporary spoken MA collected from urban native speakers across the center of Morocco, adopting a corpus-based methodology, which comprises informal speech, social media interactions, TV/radio transcripts, and written online forums. Target adverbial expressions are analyzed in terms of their distribution, positional flexibility, and functional shifts. The analysis focuses on semantic bleaching, syntactic reanalysis, and pragmatic extension, which are known to be hallmark indicators of grammaticalization.

Adopting a usage-based framework (Bybee, 2010; Croft, 2001) backed by Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 2006) and grammaticalization theory, this study highlights how recurrent discourse patterns reshape lexical items into grammatical constructions. The findings of this study are meant to contribute to our understanding of lexico-grammatical fluidity in MA and shed light on the communicative pressures that motivate linguistic change.